

Ossian H. Sweet House

Address: 2905 Garland

Local		
State	v	11/21/75
State Marker		
National	v	4/4/85



Sweet House, 2003



Historic Overview:

The home of black physician Ossian Sweet became the site of a racial incident that resulted in a nationally publicized murder trial. Dr. Sweet, a graduate of Howard University Medical School, bought this two-story brick house in an all-white Detroit neighborhood in 1925. On July 14, the neighborhood's residents protested his plans to move in and stated that they intended to retain what they called "the present high standards of the neighborhood." On September 8, Dr. Sweet, his wife, and nine gun-carrying associates moved into the house under police escort. The next night a large crowd of whites began pelting the house with rocks and bottles; they then rushed the house. A volley of gunshots issued forth from the second story windows, killing one man and seriously wounding another. The Detroit police arrested Dr. Sweet and his companions and charged them with first-degree murder. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) hired Clarence Darrow, America's most famous lawyer after his defense of evolution in the Scopes Monkey Trial, to defend Dr. Sweet. After 26 hours of deliberation, the jury returned without a verdict. Judge Frank Murphy, later to become governor of Michigan and a member of the U.S. Supreme Court, declared a mistrial and released Dr. Sweet. Subsequent trials upheld the right of Sweet and his companions, regardless of race, to protect life and property in dangerous situations. Today the Ossian Sweet House continues to illustrate the role of "ordinary" places in the extraordinary history of American race relations.¹

Text as written on the National Register of Historic Places Detroit Travel Itinerary Online.

¹ <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/detroit/d4.htm>

Picture of Dr. Sweet: <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/sweet/sweet.html>

